

The Arizona Early Intervention Program Connecting with AzEIP

Maureen Casey, a family representative on the ICC, contributed this article.

One of the cornerstones of a successful Early Intervention program is communication. You are the expert on your child and family, and your team has expertise in early childhood and their specific disciplines. Together, you will all create a plan that is unique to your child and family. To do this, all members of the team must share information on a regular basis. Your Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is what will guide those discussions.

Before your child's IFSP meetings you should spend some time thinking about your child's strengths. What does she like to do and what is she good at? Has he made his own accommodations? My son's disability affects how fast he can move. At two years old, we noticed that during games of tag he used distraction, not speed to win. We want to build on that strength. Now think about your child's needs. What areas are you concerned about? What would you like to focus on? Determine what your priorities are for you and your child and share this information with your team.

Next, think about your everyday routines and activities. What works well, what does not. Think about your mealtime, who is there, what does it look like? What activities are important to your family? What does your family like to do? What does your infant or toddler like to do? For instance, do you go to the park, or go to baby-time at the library? Do your child's delays make any of these activities hard, and if so how? Again, share this information with your team.

You have probably tried different things to address your child's needs. Sharing this with your team will



help them to understand how your child's delay affects your family. For instance, if your child's delay makes it hard for her to eat, you may have begun to feed her before the rest of the family. Think about how that affects your child and the rest of the family. Is that strategy working? Is there something you would like to change? Was that your first choice, or did you try something else first? At each session with

your team, you should begin by talking about how you did or did not use the strategies or activities suggested at the last visit. Remember, any activities your team comes up with are suggestions. They are not homework and are not intended to make your life harder; rather, suggestions should make your family's day easier. If they do not fit into your life or routine, tell your team members. If they do not know that their ideas are not working they cannot help you properly.

Once you have shared your view of your child's strengths and needs, your everyday routines and activities, your priorities and the strategies you have already tried, you and your team can discuss your outcomes. What are the things you would like to see happen? These are called Functional Outcomes (see the January – March 2006 issue for more on this). You will develop outcomes, and your team will develop strategies and activities, which will help you and your child achieve those outcomes. While this newsletter has focused on using those tips during IFSP meetings, ideally you should be having these conversations in a much smaller way during every session. The more energy you and your team put into talking about what is working and what is not working, the stronger your early intervention program will be.

This column is a collaboration between AzEIP, Raising Special Kids and Pilot Parents of Southern Arizona to benefit families of young children with disabilities in Arizona. If you have questions or suggestions for content, or if you would like information on council or committee meetings or to be on AzEIP's mailing list, call Maxine Piper at AzEIP: (602) 532-9960 or (888) 439-5609 or email allazeip2@azdes.gov